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The 'hidden strength' of active citizenship: The involvement of local residents in public safety projects

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Abstract

The past two decades or so have seen a growing interest in 'active' (or 'responsible') citizenship within local public safety projects and programmes, but little is known about how such projects function in practice. Besides presenting theoretical debates on community safety projects, this article reports empirical insights into the wealth and variety of informal, citizen-based contributions, specifically to handling communal crime and disorder in Amsterdam, capital city of the Netherlands. Subsequently, it assesses the kind of lessons empirical studies provide about the importance of 'social capital' for public participation, the perils of social exclusion and the nature of relationships between citizens and professionals. It is argued that enthusiastic efforts of individual citizens are equally important, if not more so, than strong social ties. Moreover, in overall terms, active participation tends to have a significant bias in favour of the white, middle-aged, middle-class population. Finally, benevolent citizens regularly encounter professional barriers and bureaucratic ceilings that inhibit their desire to participate. All rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, promoting genuine active citizenship is easier said than done.

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Introduction

Over the past quarter-century, the rise of crime and, in a much wider sense, insecurity have become major concerns of public debate and political action, in the Netherlands as well as many other western countries (Hughes et al., 2002; Van Der Vijver and Terpstra, 2004). One of the new directions being followed in this context is the emphasis on public–private partnerships to resolve crime and disorder (Cachet et al., 2008; Crawford, 1999a). The police and judicial authorities no longer bear the sole responsibility for maintaining public order – if they ever did. Other agencies, both public and private, should also be involved in making society safer. A related development is the promotion of the idea of 'community safety' over that of 'crime prevention' (Morgan, 1991). Crime is seen as too narrow in scope; the concept needs more breadth and depth in terms of theoretical orientation and policy approach. Instead of a limited orientation on traditional 'law enforcement', new criminological theories therefore examine the flourishing of 'multi-agency' partnerships, which incorporate a broad view not only on crime and disorder but also on dimensions of 'citizen well-being', 'live-ability' (in Dutch: *leefbaarheid*), 'healthy local economies', 'physical quality of urban environments' and 'empowered communities' (Hughes and Edwards, 2002), which move policy initiatives away from a preoccupation solely with victims and offenders.

The popularity of these endeavours has contributed to a shift of focus from 'government' to 'governance' as a means to facilitate and steer complex organizational networks (Peters and Pierre, 1998). The term governance refers to a set of institutions beyond state government, which are mutually dependent in achieving their goals, entail a certain degree of self-direction and interact on a relatively equal basis. Negation and consensus are part and parcel of the way collective action is carried out (Stoker, 1998). Whether or not the governance concept represents already long-established organizational relations and practices, cast in a new language (Frederickson, 2007), it is clear that an increasing number of institutions are seen as responsible for implementing and maintaining community safety programmes. These institutions involve not only the police, private security companies and city warden schemes (Crawford et al., 2005; Jones and Newburn, 2006); the social sector – education, youth workers and welfare work – has also come to realize that public safety issues are relevant to its work (Boutellier, 2001). Today, the governance of urban safety projects embraces a wide variety of stakeholders.

Given this background, there is a surprising paucity of empirical research on the place of citizens in community safety projects and programmes. While not entirely ignored (Button, 2002; Crawford, 2001; Johnston, 1992; Mawby, 1989; Shapland and Vagg, 1988; Shearing and Wood, 2003; Terpstra, 2009; Van Ostaaijen and Tops, 2007; Wagenaar, 2007), scholarly interest in the ways citizens participate in the 'local governance of crime' (Crawford, 1999a) is fairly limited. Studies in the field of criminal justice tend merely to concentrate on the formal, organizational side of policing and crime-fighting (Fleming and Wood, 2006; Wood and Dupont, 2006). Nonetheless, efforts to engage residents in making neighbourhoods better places to live play an increasingly

vital role in rethinking the local handling of communal crime and disorder. Reform programmes, in the UK and the Netherlands alike, are strongly geared towards:

> *active citizenship* – giving citizens more opportunities to define and tackle the programs of their communities; *strengthening communities* – helping communities form and sustain their own organizations to deal with common concerns; and *public partnerships* involving citizens and communities in the panning and delivery of public services. … In particular, [the reform programme] appears to recognize the fundamental premise that citizens and statutory agencies *co-produce* community safety; it recognizes too, the limitations of government, promising that a new participatory institutional structure will foster collective efficacy among citizens and engage public services in support. (Hope, 2005: 381, emphases in original)

The present study therefore explores the empirical wealth of informal, citizen-based contributions to the prevention or discouragement of communal crime in Amsterdam, capital city of the Netherlands. Our main questions are how and to what extent citizens are involved in local partnerships, and what lessons we can learn from this for our theoretical and political debates. In the paragraphs that follow we begin by reviewing discussions of the pros and cons of public involvement in criminal justice. Although 'active citizenship' has often been encouraged and promoted by politicians and policy-makers, it may also have an important downside. We then summarize the main Dutch policy developments towards the activation – or 'responsibilization' (Garland, 1996: 452) – of citizens in the field of community safety. Third, the article offers a definition and classification of the concept of 'citizen safety project', which is followed by an empirical survey of the characteristics and peculiarities of these projects in Amsterdam. Finally, it reflects on the empirical findings in light of existing academic discussions.

Discussions of Citizen Participation

The extant literature provides lively debates about rationalities underlying voluntary public involvement in criminal justice processes and trajectories. Therefore, we briefly review different viewpoints, optimistic as well as pessimistic. Starting with optimistic expectations, reasons for encouraging people to participate include cost reduction to the Government (albeit citizen participation is not necessarily cheaper), the 'opening up' of professionals to the general public, better synergy in the flow of information between authorities and the public and, hence, improvements in the effectiveness of criminal justice processes. Moreover, the activation of local residents in neighbourhood safety projects often has ambitious goals of crime reduction, community building and social empowerment that can guarantee (feelings of) shelter, protection and belonging (Hope, 2005). Citizen participation is believed to reaffirm communal bonds, deepen democracy and transparency and facilitate a general knowledge of what the criminal justice system is and does. This latter notion is important, because misconceptions of the gravity of problems caused by crime, and police and sentencing practices, tend to lead to an overall decrease of confidence in criminal justice operations and a more strident expression of punitive sentiments (Crawford, 2001). It is in this sense that advocates of active citizenship claim that public commitment to criminal justice

processes not only empowers forms of participatory deliberative democracy (Fung and Wright, 2001), but also helps to neutralize populist demands for 'law and order', and harsher imprisonment policies.

Nevertheless, it remains open to debate whether active citizenship is (a) easy to achieve and (b) desirable. A key theme here is what the social cost and benefits are of political motivations underlying the engagement of people in civic processes aimed at the reduction of crime and disorder (Brannan et al., 2006). First, the desire to reinvigorate a sense of 'community' to facilitate informal crime prevention mechanisms may be unrealistic, because, principally in urban settings, strong and homogenous groups of people have never existed. There is a slippage between everyday frictions that hamper moral togetherness and the idea(l)s of communitarian thinkers (Crawford, 1999a, 1999b). Moreover, detailed studies in Britain and the USA have demonstrated that citizen participation is easier to develop in middle-class areas characterized by relative affluence, low crime rates and strong reciprocal community networks that encourage mutual connectedness and support (Crawford, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Skogan, 2003). Paradoxically, citizen participation flourishes best in already privileged communities, while community organizations are less common in the poor, disadvantaged areas where they are most needed (Skogan, 1988). However, at the same time, Crawford (2006) questions the idea of well-organized middle-class neighbourhoods. He argues that social networks in such areas are actually quite weak, as families and individuals tend to live on their own, which makes it harder to attract volunteers to take part in local crime prevention programmes. Appeals to the participatory potential of 'social capital' (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) thus seem far too rosy.

Furthermore, active citizenship can hardly be achieved without the support of public professionals, most notably police officers (Carr, 2003). 'Although residents themselves can do a lot to prevent and solve problems directly and without government interference', Lelieveldt (2004: 548) writes, 'in most cases public funds, resources and governmental authority are indispensable ingredients for solutions that really work.' Nonetheless, the more organized local residents are, the greater their capability will be to connect with formal (state) institutions and thus exploit wider resources of power. This means, in the third place, that particularistic and parochial interests may affect public decision making to the detriment of already marginalized communities, possibly tending to yield troubling by-products of polarization, repression and exclusion (Crawford, 1998). In a worst-case scenario, active citizenship can derail into vigilantism (Johnston, 1996), without automatically assuming extra-legal acts of self-defence. Perceived breaches of social order and, in response, citizens' planned acts of force (actual or threatened) against the (alleged) perpetrator(s) of crime with the goal of offering assurances of security are a broader indicator of vigilante movements (Haas, 2010). As a consequence, the representativeness and legitimacy of local crime prevention initiatives can be seriously called into question.

As a fourth point, research has shown that considerable clashes of interest between the police and residential participants in local safety projects are not inconceivable. Police officers may view active citizens as troublesome 'loudmouths' who only create problems, not solve them (Terpstra, 2008). These tensions may even rebound on the

police themselves. If contradictory and sometimes unrealistic demands cannot be met to the satisfaction of participating citizens, police officers run the risk of being unfairly blamed for failures in public service delivery (Terpstra, 2010). This remark refers to a second paradox lying at the heart of active citizen engagement in local safety projects: enabling people to participate in community affairs as a means of re-legitimizing state authority simultaneously opens the door to competing cultures, values, goals and notions of order (Edwards and Hughes, 2002). Dominant discourses on the formation of partnerships tend to ignore such complexities. There is, in other words, little acknowledgement of (latent) disagreements between citizens and professionals.

Nonetheless, responsibility for community safety is increasingly shared by a wide range of 'third parties' (Buerger and Mazerolle, 1998), comprising active local residents who are drawn into the values and culture of criminal justice so as to promote a 'place guardianship' aimed at influencing and controlling individual behaviour. This may benefit police resources, in the sense that volunteers offer supplementary skills, capacity and knowledge that are otherwise not available to professional endeavours – a development that can lead to a Big Brother society colonized by 'spies and snitches' (Ayling, 2007: 91). Finally, as a third paradox, there is a fundamental flaw in the assumption of 'imposing civility through coercion' surfacing beneath the formation of defensible partnerships and communities (Crawford, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). In opposition to current policy developments, empirical evidence suggests that interventions are most effective where strategies which seek to reaffirm social cohesion and moral consciousness are not compulsory. For instance, 'parenting orders' and 'anti-social behaviour orders' imposed on British citizens have put already troublesome families under extra pressure, thereby exacerbating conflicts rather than encouraging solutions. There is thus a serious danger that quests for community safety do more harm than good.

For reasons mentioned above, Van Swaaningen (2005) posits a pessimistic diagnosis of public safety management in the Netherlands. Today's 'governance through crime' (Simon, 2007), he claims, finds its basis in a political climate of discontent and rancour that too easily divides the world into 'good' and 'bad' people – a tendency that is further encouraged by a morally loaded binary discourse of 'active' versus 'passive' citizenship. In other words, the emphasis on community-focused governance has profound implications for how 'good citizenship' is understood: it takes the concept of citizenship beyond its classical definition in terms of legal rights and obligations; being a good citizen turns into 'something to be earned' (Raco, 2007: 308). In this vein, responsibilization policies are liable to reproduce differences between a society of 'active' and 'involved' people and the 'non-integrated' – that is, citizens in the formal sense who nevertheless reside 'outside society' as a result of their inactivity (Schinkel, 2007). Although such criticism holds important warnings, dystopian thinking may also be misleading because it tends to underestimate, if not deny, plausible positive outcomes with respect to informal community safety and crime control strategies. A better option, perhaps, is both to embrace and examine critically the 'uncertain promise' (Hughes and Rowe, 2007: 320) active citizenship offers to community safety. To this end, we provide an empirical survey of Dutch policy developments leading towards responsible citizenship, and resulting in local safety projects in Amsterdam.

Dutch Policy Developments Leading towards Responsible Citizenship

The Netherlands has a long tradition of co-operation and co-production in the fight against frequently occurring 'petty' crimes such as bicycle theft and shoplifting (Cachet, 2008). From the mid-1980s onwards, it appeared that these crimes might be getting out of hand, and it was under this pressure that policy-makers started to realize that problem solving needed the active support not only of the police and local authorities, but also of societal organizations and citizens (organized or not). A hallmark was the publication of the 1985 White Paper *Society and Crime* (*Samenleving en Criminaliteit*), which advocated the integration of defensive and pro-active policies, redefining crime prevention as an 'administrative problem' for an assorted number of agents and agencies, including public as well as private organizations, and ordinary citizens. The first examples of local partnerships in the Netherlands date back to the second half of the 1980s. Under the assumption that everyday crime was caused in part by an erosion of communality and solidarity, these partnerships aimed to revitalize social bonds in neighbourhoods, and strengthen the people's (specifically youth's) attachment to schools, sports clubs and other civic institutions (Van Swaaningen, 2002). Ever since, a highly variegated landscape of collaborative initiatives and networks has mushroomed throughout the country.

According to Terpstra (2005), three closely interrelated developments have contributed to this focus on the collaborative prevention of crime and disorder. First, during the 1990s, the strategy of sharing responsibilities for crime control that had been adopted over the previous few years was advanced under the umbrella of 'integrated safety policies' (*integraal veiligheidsbeleid*), which shifted attention to all kinds of safety hazards, both social and physical. Safety problems were viewed as multi-layered; remedying communal crime was only one ambition amid the prevention of other risks, such as conflagrations and road accidents. Second, community policing became the dominant paradigm in the Netherlands, which promoted a responsible role for citizens and other stakeholders in respect of local crime, disorder and nuisance. It was in this context that the police attempted to find an answer to the growing demands placed on them, while at the same time struggling to keep their workload and costs under control. Finally, in common with many western countries, the pluralization and privatization of police services have become a widespread phenomenon in the Netherlands, with the expansion and creation of numerous regulatory agencies. In a similar vein, some attention has been paid to transferring responsibilities to local communities and their inhabitants. The Government has, in sum, made it increasingly clear that public safety is no longer 'a matter exclusively for the police. The police need partners and are therefore looking for ways of establishing worthwhile collaboration, for example through community policing' (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2004: 8).This has resulted in the growth of multi-agency operations in which the police and local government team up with a heterogeneous range of businesses, not-for-profit organizations and (groups of) voluntary citizens.

A more recent development in crime reduction policies is the dominant discourse on, for example, hard-core juvenile delinquents, chronically involved in violent offences. Among other things, this has gradually changed the focus towards more punitive

approaches and instruments, such as the expansion of police powers and harsher sentencing laws (Pakes, 2005). Politicians nevertheless realize that the continuation of preventive urban safety programmes is essential to achieve lasting results. In conjunction with law enforcement orientations, 'joint efforts' are still being recognized as paramount for success. In this regard, Van Dijk and De Waard (2009: 148) emphasize that Dutch crime control policies may better be characterized as 'pragmatic' rather than 'tolerant' or 'non-punitive' – expressions more often than not used by foreign observers (Downes, 1993) to depict a lenient climate in which illegal practices are 'condoned' in the Netherlands. At the municipal level of Amsterdam, this pragmatic policy direction has been translated into *People Make Amsterdam* (*Mensen Maken Amsterdam*), the city council programme for the 2006–2010 period. Under the council's programme, although the police and judicial services still occupy a prominent position in Amsterdam, local authorities tend to allocate other actors, not least citizens, more tasks and responsibilities in the formation and implementation of urban safety policies. Informal social controls and collective efficacy are seen as important complementary contributions to formal policing.

The question remains, though: what exactly is citizen participation in local safety policies, and what does it mean? Terpstra (2008: 221) argues that participation rests primarily on 'talking' or 'doing', 'either being more limited, or more extended'. In other words: citizen contribution to local security safety programmes can be based mainly on information exchange with the police, but may also involve direct contributions to decision-making processes. Equally, citizens can promote self-reliant behaviour by setting up a neighbourhood watch, but may also choose only to hire private security guards to patrol their properties at night. Adding more detail to such observations, the following paragraphs report an empirical study of active citizenship in Amsterdam. After outlining the definitions and research methods employed, we sketch seven pictures of citizen involvement in local safety projects.

Active Citizenship in Practice

Social scientists deliberately work with 'essentially contested concepts' (Gallie, 1962), which are always open for discussion and interpretation. Indeed, the danger of debating such elastic topics as 'active citizenship' in relation to 'community safety' is that researchers try 'to cover everything and end up covering nothing' (Hughes and Rowe, 2007: 318). As Edwards and Hughes (2005: 355) rightly point out, '[t]he diverse nomenclature of "crime prevention", "community safety", "crime and disorder reduction", "integral security", "public safety", *'Città sicure'* (safer cities), *'leefbaarheid'* (live-ability) and so on are not competing labels for the same thing.' Distinct national settings will have an inevitable effect on the uniqueness and subtleties of local situations. Because of this unavoidable diversity of initiatives and arrangements in the ways people actively participate in criminal justice, we decided to confine our working definition to *projects where private individuals in the role of citizens or local residents informally, and on a more than incidental basis, aim to advance collective safety by directly discouraging communal crime (theft, burglary, vandalism, drug dealing, etc.) and disorder (noise, litter, public drunkenness, etc.)*. Citizen safety projects may have a wider intent, such as improving

the 'quality of life' in a neighbourhood, but should, as a minimum, include plain safety and security aspects. Such projects can be the result of a citizen initiative, but they can just as well be initiated by public authorities (Marinetto, 2003). In addition, our main focus is on informal initiatives. Citizen safety projects exclude volunteers, like auxiliary police patrollers, who directly supplement or complement professionals within public organizations. Nor do projects cover 'lay' (non-professional) community representatives and magistrates who perform structural oversight and monitoring functions in relation to activities conducted by professionals (Crawford, 2001). In comparison to, for example, Britain and the USA, citizen participation has traditionally played a fairly limited role in Dutch political institutions, although it is possible that, at a low level, residents are involved in deliberations, consultations and policy formation processes.

Drawing on Terpstra (2008, 2009), we distinguish various types and models of citizen involvement in Dutch community safety policies: 'exchange of information', 'citizens as advisers or participants in decision making', 'safety activities under citizen control', promotion of 'collective efficacy and social control', promotion of 'self-reliant behaviour' and 'autonomous and exclusionary activities'. Sharpening and expanding the different elements embraced in these models, we made use of a pilot study (Scholte, 2008), which indentified an assortment of local citizen projects in relation to public safety nationwide. We did so by conducting a large-scale survey of Dutch newspaper articles over a two-year period (2005–2007). We discovered 337 articles that turned out to be relevant to our central research question, but that did not permit us to acquire an exhaustive picture of developments in the Netherlands. Projects often remain unnoticed or unrecorded in the media and are relatively often short-lived (they commonly depend heavily on the work of volunteers), while the variety of labels given to initiatives made things even more complicated. Nonetheless, the survey provided insightful information. On the basis of the articles found, we added further detail to Terpstra's work to facilitate a more exhaustive classification of projects and programmes. This eventually resulted in the identification of seven categories of public participation in community safety and crime prevention:

1. *Passive surveillance*: citizens acquire information on demand and pass their findings to the police or local authorities.
2. *Active surveillance*: citizens participate voluntarily in neighbourhood watches.
3. *Relational supervision*: citizens make use of their interpersonal contacts to impose informal social control on undesired and anti-social behaviour.
4. *Conflict mediation*: citizens are independent mediators in the resolution, for example, of a neighbour's quarrel.
5. *Advising policy-makers*: citizens have an advisory role in shaping urban safety projects.
6. *Shaping policy making*: citizens are involved in directing policy formation.
7. *Safety self-management*: citizens install physical security measures to protect their property or hire a private security company at their own expense.

Conceptually speaking, 'vigilantism' – citizens who take the law into their own hands – can also be placed under the banner of citizen safety projects. However, while not

suggesting that these forms of extra-legal actions are completely absent in the Netherlands, they are so uncommon and incidental that we decided not to list them here.

As a third step, we investigated citizen participation in local safety projects in the Amsterdam-Amstelland police region. We started by conducting both telephone and e-mail interviews with all 14 public safety co-ordinators employed by the Amsterdam boroughs and the 220 neighbourhood police officers (50 per cent of whom responded) operating in Amsterdam. Together, their answers provided a useful estimate of the total number of citizen safety projects undertaken across the city and its immediate surroundings. In addition, we carried out case studies to gather detailed illustrations of citizen safety projects. For this purpose we interviewed 30 stakeholders, including police officers, civil servants, social workers and active residents. The interviews were supplemented with documentary analysis (websites, policy documents and a regional newspaper), which gave a better description of the projects under consideration.

Citizen Safety Projects in Amsterdam

As can be seen from Table 1,475 safety-related citizen projects are operational in Amsterdam. If we exclude a variety of policy-making and advisory bodies, this number drops to almost 100. The reason such bodies were not strictly taken into account is that, although safety and security issues regularly top their agendas, they do not confine themselves strictly to problems of communal crime. Emphasis was mostly on other objectives, such as stimulating economic progress and cultural activity in distinct areas of Amsterdam. When considering more narrowly defined local safety projects, the category of 'relational supervision' turns out to be the most widespread. These projects cover citizen initiatives like 'Moroccan neighbourhood fathers' (*Marokkaanse buurtvaders*), which attempt to reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour through disciplinary, community-based pressure. To give a fuller picture of citizen participation in local safety projects, in what follows we provide a brief, empirical illustration of each category.

Table 1. Number of citizen-related safety projects in Amsterdam

Category	Including broader policy-making and advisory bodies	Excluding broader policy-making and advisory bodies
Passive surveillance	8	8
Active surveillance	14	14
Relational supervision	36	36
Conflict mediation	4	4
Advisory boards	212	22
Policy-making boards	194	4
Safety self-management	7	7
Total number	*475*	*95*

Neighbourhood thermometer (passive surveillance)

In 2005, the *Diamantbuurt*, a small neighbourhood in the borough of Amsterdam Oud-Zuid, experienced problems with Moroccan youngsters roaming the streets. The bullying of an elderly couple, who ultimately decided to move, specifically attracted a lot of media attention. Under pressure from the public outrage that followed, the borough council decided it was time to obtain better information on what was happening in the neighbourhood. The presence of police and community workers was obviously not enough to prevent serious incidents caused by unruly youths. As a solution, the borough selected about 30 residents living throughout the neighbourhood to measure the 'social temperature' in their area. Civil servants started telephoning these residents once a month to hear stories of youth misbehaviour, on which police officers or community workers could act. This project is still running successfully, although some disputes have arisen about how seriously various citizen complaints should be taken. The police sometimes felt overburdened with unrealistic fears and expectations. So far, there has been no recurrence of serious incidents. Informed as they were about rising tension by the 'neighbourhood thermometers' (*buurtthermometers*) at a very early stage, police and community workers were able to respond rapidly to incidents before things got out of hand. Furthermore, the police finally succeeded in arresting a Moroccan youth gang – a success that was partly due to information obtained from local residents.

Neighbourhood parents (active surveillance)

Around the turn of the millennium, the *Spaarndammerbuurt* in the borough of Amsterdam-Westerpark (western part of town) was shaken by two disturbing events. First, an adolescent was murdered because he dared to speak disapprovingly to a group of immigrant youngsters who were riding their scooters dangerously. Second, journalists discovered that the borough council had covered up the repeated rape of a mentally handicapped girl by another group of immigrant youngsters. Residents were appalled and decided to set up a neighbourhood watch (*buurtouderproject*) to prevent such incidents ever happening again in their community. Adverse press coverage forced the borough council to acquiesce in this initiative. The neighbourhood parents committed themselves to patrolling their neighbourhood several evenings a week. Prior to starting their patrols, the police briefed the parents about irregularities and provided participants with radios in case they needed back up. However, after six months, some immigrant members started to withdraw from the watch as they were being seen as 'traitors' by their own ethnic communities and treated accordingly. After two years, the number of active neighbourhood parents declined to three people only, making the best of it. Subsidies were cancelled, so the support of a social worker was withdrawn, but still the remaining neighbourhood parents continued their work for a couple of years. When some parents started acting like quasi-police officers, the police finally terminated the project.

Connect Initiatives (relational supervision)

Connect Initiatives (*Connect Iniatieven)* is the name of a citizen project founded in the borough of *Bos en Lommer* (Amsterdam-West). Its founder is a Moroccan immigrant

who grew up in the neighbourhood and, like many of his friends, got into a lot of trouble. He felt trapped between the Moroccan and Dutch cultures, eventually belonging nowhere; he was taken out of school without a diploma at age 16, and received inadequate guidance, either from the official institutions or his parents, who were mostly unaware of all the problems. This alleged 'drop-out', however, managed to overcome his poor start and build a successful career as a youth worker. Throughout the years he developed his own vision of how to keep young Moroccan deviants on track. With the help of these youngsters, for example, he started to collect second-hand hospital equipment, which was patched up and sent to Morocco. After a while, in 2006, he established Connect Initiatives, which initiated a meeting point for Moroccan fathers where they received coaching in dealing with all kinds of family problems. In addition, Connect Initiatives offers Moroccan youths assistance in finding internships and jobs, and involves them personally in keeping the neighbourhood safe and clean. In this way, the project tries to cut through the vicious spiral of school dropout, criminal behaviour and eventually marginalization.

Connect Initiatives and Better Neighbouring (conflict mediation)

Connect Initiatives also invests in good relationships with the neighbourhood police team. In particular, the project plays a role in enhancing mutual understanding and acceptance between local police officers and Moroccan youths. Furthermore, Connect Initiatives assists the police with informal conflict mediation to calm down hostility and avoid escalation. For instance, after a Moroccan teenager died in a crash caused by his flight from police pursuit, the police anticipated demonstrations and unrest. At the police's request, Connect Initiatives called on 20 Moroccan community leaders to ease the situation, although their assistance ultimately turned out to be unnecessary. Another good example of conflict mediation is Better Neighbouring (*Beter Buren*), a citizen initiative founded in 2004. This colourful group of volunteers, all residing in Amsterdam, are trained to mediate in quarrels between their fellow city residents. In crowded metropolises like Amsterdam, neighbours occasionally encroach on each others' territories, sparking off conflicts about noise, bad smells, litter, pets, insults and other (not so 'minor') disturbances. Complainants and respondents are brought together on a voluntary, equal basis, to try to encourage fruitful communication and co-operation between them. Volunteers have no powers over and above the disputants, other than their own social skills. They operate independently, but are linked to police services, municipal authorities and housing associations through a covenant, as professional intervention is sometimes deemed necessary in conflict situations.

Think tank – denktank Meer en Oever (advising policy-makers)

A few years ago, the borough of Osdorp announced urban renewal plans for Meer en Oever, a small, impoverished area in the western suburbs of Amsterdam. Old, four-storey apartments were torn down and replaced by both rental (social housing) and for-sale condominiums. As a negative side-effect, this redevelopment programme deepened the existing tendencies towards social segregation, as nearly all the families that came to live in the rental units, concentrated in one of the three new apartment blocks, were of immigrant origin. This resulted in an unfortunate mixture of children and teenagers,

some of whom started to cause serious trouble. Vandalism marred the new estates, accounting for over €100,000 damage within six months, which left the immigrant population as the scapegoat. In response, the borough council decided to hire a communications agency to establish a 'think tank' (*denktank Meer en Oever*) comprising residents from a variety of (ethnic) backgrounds with the goal of promoting dialogue and cooperation on the issue. The think tank published a newsletter, organized a 'get-to-know-each-other-party' and came up with solutions for youth boredom and misbehaviour. Neighbourhood children, for instance, obtained permission to use a school playground, located in the middle of their apartment blocks. During its start-up phase, the think tank project was fraught with friction between active residents and policy-makers. Policy-makers could hardly stay abreast of the think tank's enthusiasm and ideas, while residents criticized policy-makers for a lack of support. This situation seems to have stabilized at the time of writing.

Safety inspection team (shaping policy making)

In 2005, a group of residents in Amsterdam's Red Light district (besides the well-known sex industry, approximately 3000 people live in this area) revolted against the local authorities, because, in their opinion, the nuisance caused by drugs and prostitution had got out of hand. Specifically, homeless people roaming the streets, large numbers of drunken tourists and the overt use of drugs were thorns in the residents' flesh. After a tumultuous public hearing before the borough council, it was decided to create safety inspection teams (*veiligheidsschouw*) to evaluate the situation. Currently, local residents, shopkeepers, civil servants and police officers together are conducting regular patrols along eight different routes to ascertain objectively the extent of the nuisance. During the day as well as at night, these patrols gather information on trouble caused by the physical presence of drug dealers, drug addicts, prostitutes, beggars and other such types, and the litter (e.g. used condoms and dirty needles) they leave behind. The inspection rounds result in maps showing the sites of disorder, marked green, yellow, red or purple depending on how excessive the problems are. These mutual disorder assessments are evaluated by the police and the municipality to undertake appropriate action in the right places, at the right time. A major gain of this strategy is the improved information exchange between the police, the municipality, residents and local businesses. The project has shortened communication lines and encouraged mutual agreement on the seriousness of the problems. This allows both policy-makers and citizens to design focused interventions that address communal crime and disorder. Policing resources have become more tailor-made to tackle certain 'hot spots'.

Anti-burglary project (safety self-management)

Over previous years, several safety self-management schemes such as anti-burglary projects (*anti-inbraakprojecten*) have been initiated throughout the city. One of these projects concerns a small villa complex in Amsterdam-Buitenveldert, a prosperous southern suburb. The primary reason behind this project was a series of burglaries in the

area. Because residents had never previously experienced any burglary, felt very safe and therefore behaved quite negligently (leaving windows and garden doors unlocked), they were easy prey for clever criminals. In response, the neighbourhood police officer wrote a letter to all 50 households, warning them against risks and hazards. Together, the residents organized an informal meeting with the local police officer to gather practical advice on anti-burglary measures. Moreover, they established a newsletter and e-mail correspondence to keep each other informed of any incidents. After replacing outdated alarm systems and improving public lighting, the next discussion was whether they should hire a private security company to follow up any alarms. So far, however, there is disagreement about how to finance this plan. Not every resident is willing to pay for contracted guard services. Only the future will tell what course developments will take.

Reflections on Active Citizenship

What all the projects described above have in common is that, one way or another, they assume active citizen involvement in criminal justice. We now consider what can be learned from these projects in relation to wider research on community safety. Special attention is given to discussions of the importance of 'social capital' for public participation, the perils of social exclusion and the nature of relationships between citizens and professionals.

At first sight, there is something of a contradiction in the appeals by public authorities for active citizenship. As Flint (2002: 254) stresses, 'active citizenship requires an attachment to community that is least likely to be present in the very urban areas that experience most disorder'. Government appeals to active citizenship by no means guarantee that citizens will be able and willing to dedicate themselves to long-term efforts. It is unrealistic to assume that communities can simultaneously be the cause of, and the solution to, dynamics of urban decay. Therefore, social disorganization theorists are criticized for being too bold in their claim that neighbourhood mechanisms, foremost among which are informal social controls (i.e. the provision of 'ears and eyes' on the street), can help reduce crime and disorder (Van Stokkom, 2008). Ideological assumptions appear to collide with the realities of social and geographical neighbourhood settings.

Looking at the initiatives we found in Amsterdam, it may indeed be the case that residents from an affluent neighbourhood with a shared common interest ('safety self-management project') are better equipped to generating productive results than their fellow citizens in more backward locations. Strong social ties (and money) do matter. Nonetheless, these forms of 'bonding social capital' (Putnam, 2000: 22) are not *a sine qua non* for participation. Local projects like the 'safety inspection team', 'neighbourhood watch' and 'think tank' we described arose from incidents and accidents (used condoms and needles lying around, violent youth destroying property, even rape and murder) that bring people together who are normally weakly connected. In this respect, Bang (2005) underlines the crucial input of what he coins 'everyday makers': citizens who are politically engaged not for the sake of social representation and association, but for direct handling and pragmatic problem solving. Something needs to be done, and fast.

However, it is uncertain whether more-or-less spontaneous citizen involvement will be successful and sustainable over a longer period of time. In fact, 'the strength of weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) greatly depends on what Crawford (2006: 962) refers to as 'linking social capital': the ties that connect people to formal institutions. This is, for instance, clearly discernible in the case of Connect Initiatives, a project that facilitates co-operation *within* an ethnic (Moroccan) minority as well as stimulating connections *between* this group and power resources beyond their local communities. Yet the notion that active citizenship only works where local communities are supported by public authorities situated within the wider city works the other way around, too. As the 'neighbourhood thermometers' project makes clear, without the assistance of watchful residents, local government would be virtually blind. The call for community safety schemes is thus a double-edged phenomenon, which is as much about a stronger participatory society as it is about strengthening state controls.

A potential drawback of far-reaching interrelations between citizens and professionals, then, is the banishment of 'unwanted others'. On a micro-level this becomes visible in acts of 'defensive exclusivity' (Crawford, 1998: 245), such as setting up citizen inspection teams ('shaping policy making') and private watches ('active surveillance') and installing alarm systems and surveillance cameras ('safety self-management'). On a macro-level, the municipality, for its part, is faced with an uneven pattern of activity across the city. In Amsterdam, apart from marked exceptions such as the Connect Initiatives, safety-related citizen projects still have a significant bias in favour of the white, middle-aged, middle-class population. A major theme, therefore, is how to raise citizens' competences so that the goal of activation and empowerment can truly be achieved (Kearns, 1995). Although community safety can make a big difference, the processes in which people are activated are often more multifaceted and contentious than policy-makers sometimes imply.

This brings us to 'professionals barriers', which the police tend to erect when faced with community safety programmes in Amsterdam. Despite rhetoric about community involvement, police officers tend to try to keep their distance from citizens – not in the last place because, explicitly or implicitly, they depict themselves as the experts in instant problem solving. Embracing overly close relationships with citizens may gravely undermine the police's neutral and imperative role. A related issue – a second backdrop – is that citizens regularly run up against a 'bureaucratic ceiling'. Notwithstanding promises that the procedures and requirements will be reduced, thus enabling citizen initiatives to flourish, people often feel discouraged by the obstacles local authorities tend to erect. It takes a lot of patience and perseverance to pull a project off. Many attempts to 'get active' fail by virtue of the same democratic processes people would like to participate in. The current popularity of New Public Management (NPM) is more likely to widen than dissolve this distance, which is felt between local police officers and citizens. While, given today's political mindset, the police organization should be run like a customer-friendly 'business' (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), a direct consequence of NPM is, ironically, that it ultimately results in a growing incongruity between the ethos of police officers on the one and the expectations of (responsible) citizens on the other (Haque, 1999). Philosophies of activating communities thus look more rigorous in theory than in the reality of their implementation.

Conclusion

This article has explored safety-related citizen projects in Amsterdam that aspire to reduce communal crime and disorder in urban environments. In so doing, it has sought to uncover the 'hidden strength' of active citizenship in public safety governance. Citizen projects can be categorized as: passive surveillance; active surveillance; relational supervision; conflict mediation; advising policy-makers; shaping policy making and safety self-management. Projects often rely profoundly on the enthusiasm of individual citizens and the resources that public professionals provide. Active citizenship will only flourish if it receives tangible appreciation and coaching from the police and government authorities. However, one of the problems observed is the disparity of expectations and perspectives between citizens and professionals. In addition, minority groups and other less privileged residents are comparatively underrepresented in communal safety projects. High expectations about inclusive community involvement in local neighbourhood programmes are therefore difficult to fulfil.

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